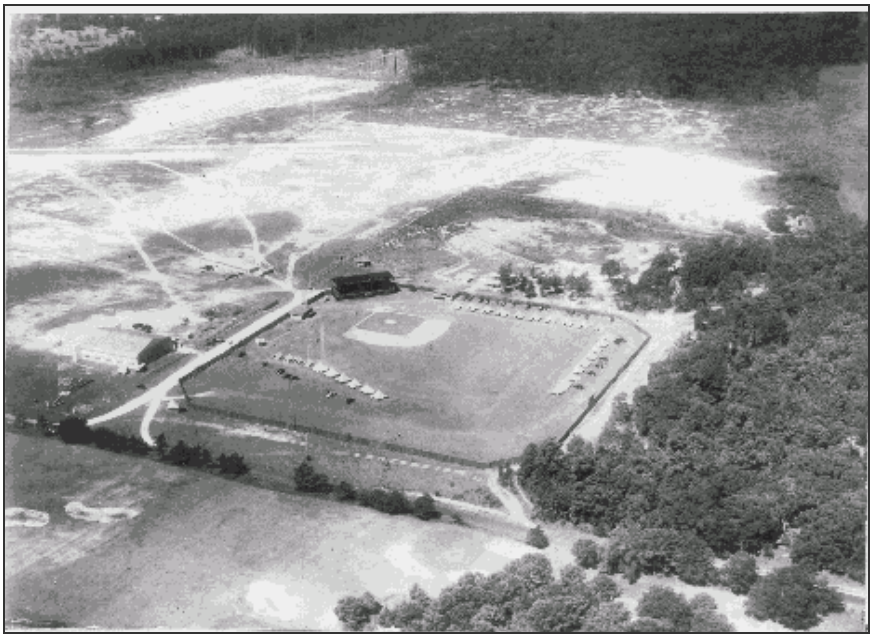
A SHORT HISTORY OF
KEESLER AIR FORCE BASE

Early Development: 1939 - 1949

Great harvests of seafood and timber gave the Gulf Coast economy several bursts of spectacular growth in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By the late 1920s, however, the once-incredible seafood hauls had tapered off and the seemingly endless forests had been logged out, leaving tourism as the largest remaining source of revenue for cities like Biloxi. Unfortunately, tourism only travels with prosperity, and by the time the Great Depression had reached its halfway mark in the mid-1930s, Biloxi officials knew the city would need an economic transfusion if it was to survive. City Mayor Louis Braun, Chamber of Commerce Secretary Anthony V. Ragusin, and other city leaders began looking for new and better ways to market Biloxi's attractions.



The Biloxi Country Club was previously located on the site of Keesler, consisting of an airport, ball park, and golf course.

Improved access was one obvious measure, and city officials decided to build a commercial airport several miles northwest of the city's business district. Plans approved by the Civil Aeronautics Administration called for a large hangar, a weather station, a beacon light, and a 3,000-foot runway. The federal Works Projects

Administration provided funding, and workers began clearing the site in 1935. When U.S. Army maneuvers were held in 1938--at the time the largest peacetime military event in the South since the Civil War--the new facility hosted Air Corps observation squadrons from Maxwell Field, Alabama, along with Alabama and Tennessee guard air units. No one could have foreseen it then, but Biloxi's airport was about to become the acorn from which would grow one of the finest technical training complexes in the United States.

While Biloxi struggled to work its way out of the Depression, world events were setting great changes in motion. Totalitarian regimes had come to power in Europe and the Far East, and their aggressive policies threatened world peace. In the summer of 1938, President Franklin D. Roosevelt warned America of the growing danger, and he proposed greatly increased government spending to modernize the nation's long-neglected defenses. Amidst heated opposition by isolationists, Congress agreed by the narrowest of margins to support Roosevelt's military expansion programs, including enlargement of the Air Corps. That Fall, the War Department drafted plans for an air force of up to 10,000 modern, combat-ready planes--an increase of almost ten-fold over the existing establishment--along with proportionally expanded training programs for the huge numbers of additional aircrew, aircraft and engine mechanics, and other support personnel that would be needed.

Given the enormity of the task, it was immediately apparent that the Air Corps' existing training establishment would have to be supplemented, especially as to aircrew production. A cooperative scheme was soon devised in which private enterprise would provide instructors and training facilities, while the government would furnish students and trainer aircraft. Within months, contract-flying schools were springing up all over the country. Seeking every opportunity to broaden the city's economic base, Biloxi officials closely followed these developments. In April 1939, they asked members of Mississippi's congressional delegation to provide them with more information about the Army's pilot training program. City officials heard nothing for about a year, and then came the disheartening news that the War Department was not inclined to build any facilities in coastal towns for fear of attack by enemy naval forces.

Meanwhile, war had broken out in Europe and the Army Air Corps' training bases quickly filled to capacity. The War Department announced its intention to build two new ground crew training bases. Biloxi officials were determined that their city would house one of those bases

regardless of the risk of coastal attack. On 4 November 1940, Chamber of Commerce Secretary Ragusin sent a proposal to Brig Gen Rush B. Lincoln, the commanding general of Chanute Field, Illinois, and the Air Corps official responsible for identifying potential training base sites. Ragusin urged that Biloxi be considered for one of the new bases, and he offered the use of the city's airport to “sweeten the deal,” along with access improvements and additional land for school facilities. Ragusin's offer was attractive, and General Lincoln sent two of his staff, Lt Col Arthur W. Brock and Capt William P. Sloan, to visit the area. Colonel Brock was impressed with the location, the climate, and the strong backing of the local community.

Encouraged by the Army's interest, Biloxi officials worked feverishly to have the runway paved and to obtain options on additional land in preparation for a bid to acquire the new base. By early January 1941, city officials had assembled their formal offer; the package included the airport, the Naval Reserve Park, and parts of Oak Park sufficient to support a 5,200-man technical training school. In addition, Ragusin and Mayor Braun had persuaded the Veterans Administration to release the section of its holdings needed to extend the airport runway to 5,500 feet.

General Lincoln was convinced by the city's proposal, and he recommended Biloxi as one of the two locations most suitable for the new technical schools. But events had already moved well beyond the projections of 1940, and when the War Department expanded the schools' student capacity from 5,200 to 12,000 and then to 24,000 men, Army engineers had to revise building plans, more land had to be acquired, and additional government monies had to be appropriated. Not to be left out, the city responded with an expanded proposal that added the Biloxi Golf Club's links and clubhouse, the Wilkes Boy Scout Camp, a softball park, and numerous privately-owned parcels to the original offer--in all, some 685 acres. On 6 March 1941, the War Department officially notified Mayor Braun that Biloxi had been selected.

The War Department activated Army Air Corps Station No. 8, Aviation Mechanics School, Biloxi, Mississippi, on 12 June 1941. City officials wanted the base named after a notable figure in the local area's history, but it was War Department policy to name installations after service members killed in action. In late June, Mayor Braun received word that the new school would be named in honor of 2d Lt Samuel Reeves Keesler, Jr., of Greenwood, Mississippi. Lieutenant Keesler had died of wounds during World War I while serving in France as an aerial

observer assigned to the 24th Aero Squadron, U.S. Army Air Service. On 25 August 1941, Army Air Corps Station No. 8 was officially designated as Keesler Army Airfield.

Base Construction

Congress initially appropriated $6 million for construction at Biloxi and an additional $2 million for equipment. By the time the War Department allocated the funds in April 1941, the projected cost had risen to $9.6 million. On 14 June 1941, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers awarded Newton, Glenn, and Knost Construction Company and J. A. Jones Construction Company contracts totaling $10 million to build Biloxi's technical training school. At the time, it was the most expensive government project to have been undertaken in the State of Mississippi.

Surveyors laid out streets even as the buildings were going up. East-west thoroughfares received letter designations, while north-south streets were numbered. The Corps of Engineers built rail spurs from the Louisville & Nashville Railroad's main tracks onto the base for freight shipments. By early July, construction was in full swing, and the project was employing thousands of laborers--many of them from the local area. In less than three months, they had created "a city within a city." As originally built, the base consisted of over 660 buildings--from barracks to classrooms and warehouses to chapels. After a decade of hard times, the construction contracts and their attendant payrolls made Biloxi's merchants ecstatic; prosperity had returned to the Gulf Coast.

First Soldiers Arrive

Captain Samuel A. Mundell arrived in Biloxi on 12 June 1941. He was joined two days later by a “start up” cadre from Scott Field, Illinois, consisting of a second lieutenant and 20 enlisted personnel; they established a temporary headquarters at the Biloxi Armory. Lieutenant Colonel William J. Hanlon arrived on 16 June to assume command from Captain Mundell. The same Arthur W. Brock who had first examined the site in January, now promoted to colonel, arrived on 17 July to become the base's first permanent commander.

Contractors used standardized floor plans to finish buildings quickly.

Troops soon began pouring onto the base. With barracks construction still incomplete, the only available housing consisted of 650 tents pitched in the former Naval Reserve Park. On 8 September 1941, the 310th Technical School Squadron (the mess unit) became the first squadron to move to the new barracks. Before the end of the month, three basic training units, the 301st, 303d, and 304th Technical School Squadrons, had also moved into permanent quarters.

Basic Training

When the War Department activated Keesler Field in June 1941, the local community thought it was getting a technical training center with a student population, which might peak, at 20,000 men. However, expectations changed dramatically that summer, as the nation suddenly began to prepare for war in earnest. Not only was Keesler to house a technical training center, but it would also host one of the Army's newest replacement, or basic training centers. Keesler's population almost doubled overnight.

Unfortunately, base planners were not aware that parts of Keesler had a drainage problem. When the rainy season arrived “Tent City” became “Swamp City.” Initial base recruits even nicknamed one area “Guadacanal.” It was not long before engineers found a solution to the

drainage problem. They built wooden platforms to lift tents off the ground. Builders replaced the tents with 398 tarpaper hutments, which could hold 15 men each. The total cost of the project was $346,708, plus an additional $6,206 for electricity.

The first shipment of recruits arrived at Keesler Field on 21 August 1941. During World War II, the Army's basic training program was little more than a reception process. It accessioned and outfitted new recruits, gave them a brief introduction to military life, and then shipped them to a technical school. At Keesler, basic training lasted four weeks, during which classifiers determined the type of follow-on schooling that each recruit would receive. Many stayed at Keesler to become airplane and engine mechanics, while others transferred to aerial gunnery or aviation cadet schools. Trains passed through Keesler daily, dropping off new trainees and picking up graduates.

Throughout its service at Keesler, the Basic Training Center was extremely undermanned: on average, the center had only one officer assigned for every 404 trainees and one enlisted instructor for 62 recruits. By September 1944, the number of recruits had dropped, but the workload remained constant, as Keesler personnel began processing veteran ground troops and combat crews who had returned from duty overseas for additional training and follow-on assignments. Basic training wound down drastically after the end of World War II, and it was finally discontinued at Keesler on 30 June 1946.

Technical Training

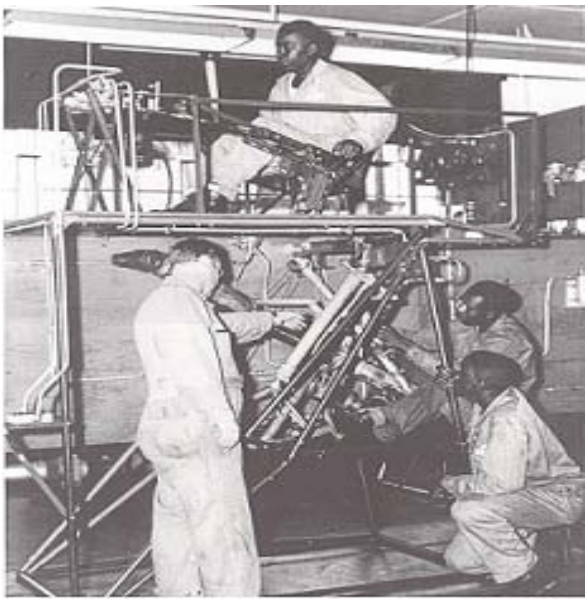
Technical training school officers and staff began arriving at Keesler Field in mid-July 1941, primarily from Chanute Field, Illinois. There was little time to waste, as they had only a few months in which to assemble equipment and to prepare class lectures and schedules before the school opened on 29 September.

The new academic buildings were still under construction when the Airplane and Engine Mechanics School opened. Basic Branch students received instruction in five barracks buildings; Instructor Branch students were assigned to temporary classrooms set up in commandeered circus tents. Completion of the last of six academic buildings made these temporary measures unnecessary after October 1941.

Keesler Field’s first headquarters building was completed in 1941.

In mid-1942 the Army Air Forces directed Keesler to focus upon the training of mechanics for B-24 Liberator heavy bombers. The school received its first B-24 in late September 1942. Six more arrived shortly thereafter, and specialized B-24 maintenance training began on 19 October. At the same time, the technical school began operating 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and class sizes grew from 800 to 900, and then to 1,000 students. The shortage of qualified instructors was so severe that one-half of the first graduating class was held back to teach. Over time, Keesler gradually replaced them with civilian instructors, including many women.

Generally unknown to most is the role that the Tuskegee Airmen and other black troops played at Keesler. More that 7,000 African-Americans were stationed at Keesler Field by the autumn of 1943. These soldiers included pre-aviation cadets, radio operators, aviation technicians, bombardiers, and aviation mechanics. Many others, like First Sergeant Lucius Theus, a future major general, also served with distinction in Keesler's permanently assigned black units that were not connected to Tuskegee. These African-Americans service members took a giant step forward in their goal of winning wars on two fronts—the struggle against racism at home, and the fight against our Axis enemies.



African-American troops trained in many specialties at Keesler in the 1940s

Keesler continued to focus upon specialized training in B-24 maintenance until mid-1944. Thereafter, the base was directed to expand its mechanics training curriculums to include other aircraft. In addition to the B-24, students learned how to repair and maintain the B-25, B-26, and B-32 bombers; A-20 and A-26 attack planes; and the C-46, C-47, and C-54 transports. Changing requirements forced the consolidation of all air-rescue training at Keesler in early 1945, however, and many of these programs had to be moved elsewhere for lack of facility space.

Specialized Flying Training

The rapid build-up of heavy bomber units overseas demanded additional aircrew, and Keesler was tasked to assist in the spring of 1944. A B-24 Co-Pilot School began operation in July, and its curriculum was expanded to include B-32 co-pilot training in October. Procured in small numbers as a back-up aircraft design for the B-29

During WWII B-24 maintenance training was taught at Keesler's Airplane and Engine Mechanics School

strategic bomber program, the B-32 Terminator was plagued with mechanical problems and production delays. Its contribution to the war effort was limited, and B-32 aircrew training ceased in January 1945. The need for B-24 crews had also diminished, and Keesler stopped training B-24 co-pilots two months later.

In late July 1944, the Army Air Forces (AAF) consolidated all air-sea rescue training at Keesler. The Emergency Rescue School (ERS) taught aircrews how to best conduct rescue operations; it also evaluated new techniques and equipment. The addition of another major program imposed a significant space problem, however, as Keesler's academic and maintenance facilities were already stretched to capacity, as were its student housing and other support functions. The situation worsened on 4 January 1945, when the AAF Training Command ordered Keesler to give first priority to air-sea rescue training. The Airplane and Engine Mechanics School was forced to give up even more of its training space as a result, but that disadvantage was not permanent. The Emergency Rescue School was disbanded in April 1946. Thereafter, air-sea rescue training passed to the Air Transport Command's newly established Air Rescue Service.

Post World War II Era

With victory achieved and peace restored, the United States began a massive demobilization effort. Paradoxically, the war's end brought about an increase in Keesler's student population. The base lost its Basic Training Center and the Emergency Rescue School in 1946, but more Army Air Forces personnel came to Biloxi than left as other bases curtailed their operations. For example, when Amarillo Army Airfield closed, most of its airplane and engine mechanic students transferred to Keesler, thereby increasing the student body by almost 50 percent. Keesler also gained five other schools in 1946: Supply Officers, Military Police, Air Chemical, Pre-Meteorology, and Cooks. In addition, Keesler absorbed the rotary wing or helicopter mechanic course previously taught at Sheppard Field, Texas. The net result of these changes was that Keesler continued to be the AAF Technical Training Command's largest installation--an honor it had held since its inception.

In late May 1947, the AAF announced plans to move its Radar School from Boca Raton, Florida, to Keesler. In preparation, base workers converted 32 barracks into classrooms for the radar fundamentals course and one hangar into classrooms and laboratories for the electronics course. The Radar School officially arrived on 14 November 1947, making Keesler responsible for operating the two largest military technical schools in the United States. Thereafter, shrinking budgets forced the base to reduce its operating costs: the Airplane and Engine Mechanics School and the Radar School were consolidated on 1 April 1948.

Meanwhile, in September 1947, the United States Air Force became an independent branch of the armed services. As a result, Keesler Field was officially redesignated as an Air Force base on 13 January 1948.

In early 1949, Air Training Command decided that Keesler should focus its efforts on teaching radar, radio, and electronics maintenance and repair. To make room, the airplane and engine mechanics courses had to be moved elsewhere--especially since the Air Force also planned to transfer the Radio Operations School to Keesler from Scott AFB, Illinois. In addition to training radio operators, Keesler was to begin teaching air traffic service technicians; aircraft approach controllers, ground radar mechanics, and radar repairman-ground controlled approach specialists. The last mechanics training courses had moved to Sheppard AFB, Texas, by November, and it was at this point in the base's

history that Keesler became known as the "Electronics Training Center of the Air Force."

The Korean War and the 1950s

Previously the home of the largest airplane and engine mechanics school in the United States, Keesler entered the new decade determined to develop the best radar and communications training program in the world--a goal made all the more important as the deepening tensions between the democratic West and the communist East came to be called the Cold War. To attain its goal, Keesler sought funding for new and expanded classrooms and student dormitories to replace the “temporary” facilities it had worked in and lived with for over nine years. Those plans were abruptly set aside when the Cold War suddenly turned hot in a small Asian country called Korea.

The North Korean People's Army moved swiftly into South Korea in June 1950; defending U.S. forces were taken by surprise, and for a brief time the aggressors threatened to push them into the sea. Within days the Air Force had assumed a virtual wartime operating tempo, and by mid-July, Keesler's technical school had adopted a six-day work schedule to graduate the additional radio and electronics technicians needed in the Far East. Shortages of trained manpower impacted other USAF skill specialties as well, and Keesler again began to provide basic training to incoming recruits. In late 1951, the Air Training Command opened two new basic training centers, --one at Sampson AFB, New York, and the other at Parks AFB, California--thereby downsizing that facet of Keesler's mission. Even so, Keesler still did not have the suitable facilities to accommodate its increased population.

In August 1950, Keesler embarked on a major rebuilding program to upgrade its facilities across the board. The first phase of this project called for the construction of a new electronics laboratory, barracks, and a dining hall for a total cost of $14 million. In 1951, Congress appropriated an additional $44 million to complete Keesler's reconstruction. Plans included four two-story academic buildings (later named Allee, Dolan, Thomson, and Wolfe Halls), a 352-bed hospital, modern family housing units, and a high-rise dormitory complex dubbed "the triangle" because of its distinctive layout.

The miniaturization of modern electronics and its use in military technology created the need for a new training mission at Keesler.

The 1950s also meant organizational change for Keesler. Since August 1948, the 3380th Technical Training Wing had controlled all base activities. Under it were four subordinate units: the 3380th Technical Training Group, which operated the school; the 3380th Maintenance and Supply Group; the 3380th Air Base Group; and the 3380th Medical Group. In 1955, a fifth group was added: the 3380th Installations Group. That arrangement continued until 1 January 1959, when Air Training Command redesignated the wing as Headquarters, Keesler Technical Training Center (KTTC). At the same time, the training group was redesignated as the 3380th Technical School, USAF,

and all of its subordinate student squadrons were renamed school squadrons.

Technical Training

Keesler's modernization required more than expanded facilities. The base also faced a severe shortage of qualified instructors. This encouraged the faculty to explore some innovative remedies. For example, Keesler began using television instruction methods as early as June 1953. The radar and communications curricula also underwent many changes, reflecting the constantly increasing importance and complexity of electronics technologies. In 1950, Keesler offered only 14 generalized courses, but by December 1959 that number had grown to 116, including vital USAF programs such as the aircraft warning and control system. Deploying that one system would require 25,000 new radar technicians alone--that they were produced on time only gave further proof of Keesler's importance to the nation's defense.

In early 1956, Keesler entered the missile age by opening a ground support training program for the SM-65 Atlas intercontinental ballistic missile. In addition, school personnel were developing training methods for the newly adopted semi-automatic ground environment (SAGE) system, an integrated defense net intended to protect the United States from Soviet air attack. It was SAGE that first introduced Keesler personnel to the complexities of the digital computer. The base gained even more responsibility in 1958, when the Air Force announced that Scott AFB would relinquish its training mission. As a result, all control tower operator, radio maintenance, and general radio operator courses came to be under Keesler's already broad technical training roof.

The 1960s

By 1960 the school at Keesler had earned solid reputation for high technology training, offering courses in radar, communications, and electronics. No longer was the base associated with wrench-wielding student mechanics in greasy coveralls. Instead, Keesler officials devoted their energies to newly-fielded electronic weapon systems and the revolutionary technical developments emerging from the space race. These new technologies required complex, environmentally sensitive computers, simulators, and training devices--meaning that Keesler needed modern, air-conditioned facilities. Builders tore down many of the base's small World War II-era structures and replaced them with spacious, multi-storied schoolhouses, such as Bryan, Jones, Hewes,

Maltby, and Cody Halls. To use television teaching to best advantage, a closed circuit audiovisual system was designed to teach electronics principles; its installation was completed in 1962.

During the early l960s, Keesler lost many of its airborne training courses, and the aircraft they required. The TC-54s assigned to electronic warfare officer training departed for Mather AFB, California, in April 1961. In December 1962, the Air-Ground Operations School and its T-33s transferred to Eglin AFB, Florida; they had filled Biloxi's airspace with jet noise since 1957. The last C-47 used for ground approach radar training left in 1966, when it was replaced by an earth-bound simulator.

By the mid-1960s, the United States was beginning to deploy substantial forces in Southeast Asia. The Vietnam War buildup caused base-wide shortages of everything from uniforms to postal boxes, but it also returned pilot training to Keesler for the first time since 1953. On 15 January 1967, the 3389th Pilot Training Squadron was activated and equipped with T-28 Trojans. Its mission was to teach Military Assistance Program (MAP) students how to fly. The squadron hosted personnel from many countries, including Iran, Mexico, and Peru, but especially from South Vietnam. Of the 908 pilots who graduated before the squadron inactivated in 1973, 743 were from that beleaguered country.

Advances in technology led to rapid changes in Keesler's training and infrastructure.

Meanwhile, all Air Force basic training at Keesler ceased when Air Training Command assigned that responsibility solely to Lackland AFB,

Texas, in 1966. A milestone was attained on 11 June 1968, when Keesler graduated its one-millionth student. A month later the school absorbed the personnel and administrative courses that Amarillo AFB had taught. These courses increased Keesler's student load by almost 20 percent.

In August 1969, Hurricane Camille struck the Mississippi Gulf Coast. The most destructive hurricane on record, it devastated communities in five states and took over 260 lives. Officials estimated Keesler's losses at $3.5 million. Immediately after the storm, Keesler personnel assisted local agencies with rescue and relief efforts. The entire military community--students and permanent party--worked day and night to clear debris, distribute aid, and control traffic. President Richard M. Nixon came to personally view the damage, and he publicly commended the base's humanitarian work.

Technology Continues into 1970s

Keesler remained the largest training base within ATC throughout the 1970s, and it continued to stay on the cutting edge of electronics technology, instructing students in new systems such as the worldwide military command and control system and the 407L radar system. The school was the country's main supplier of electronics technicians. Unfortunately, the traditional division between academic and technical studies meant that Keesler's graduates could not receive college credits for their efforts; however, that was about to change.

On 31 May 1972, Air Training Command redesignated the 3380th Technical School as the USAF School of Applied Aerospace Sciences. Soon after, on 13 December, the school received institutional accreditation from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. As a result, airmen trained at Keesler could receive a Career Educational Certificate from the newly established Community College of the Air Force. This opportunity was further expanded in April 1977, when Keesler graduates became eligible to apply their technical training towards the award of an Associate of Arts degree.

Keesler's student load dropped to an all-time low after the Vietnam War ended, and Air Force officials responded to changing social conditions by reexamining the school's teaching functions. What evolved was a new, more efficient organization that placed greater emphasis on the military role of the students and the school. As a result, Air Training Command inactivated the USAF School of Applied Aerospace Sciences

on 1 April 1977 and replaced it with the 3300th Technical Training Wing, which activated the same day.

Tenant Support

As the Vietnam War began winding down, so too did the need to train Vietnamese pilots. The MAP foreign pilot training program was halted in 1973, again leaving Keesler without a flying mission. That situation did not last long, however, as several flying units were reassigned to Keesler during the 1970s. On 16 April 1973, the Department of Defense announced that the Military Airlift Command (MAC) would transfer two squadrons to Keesler: the 1st Aerospace Cartographic and Geodetic Squadron from Forbes AFB, Kansas, and the 53d Weather Reconnaissance Squadron from Ramey AFB, Puerto Rico. The 1st Aerospace Cartographic and Geodetic Squadron used its RC-130s to conduct photomapping assignments worldwide, while the 53d went "hurricane hunting" throughout the Caribbean with its WC-130s.

These squadrons were tenant units at Keesler, meaning that they relied on various base organizations for support but were not otherwise a part of Keesler's command structure. Both units were in place by 31 July 1973. In addition to the units belonging to Military Airlift Command, Keesler also gained an Air Force Reserve tenant in April 1973 when the 920th Tactical Airlift Group activated. This unit flew C-130 Hercules turboprop transport aircraft.

The increased number of large aircraft underscored the need for airfield improvements. Starting in January 1974, engineers began extending the runway and converting two hangars to aircraft maintenance shops. Even before these projects could be completed, however, the Air Force proposed transferring yet another unit to Keesler--the 7th Airborne Command and Control Squadron. This unit had been assigned to Pacific Air Forces and stationed in Southeast Asia. With U.S. involvement ended in Vietnam, the 7th was no longer needed in the Far East, and Keesler was selected as the new home for the 7th's EC-130 airborne command and control aircraft. The squadron arrived in August 1975; as a base tenant unit, it reported to Tactical Air Command.

The End of the Cold War and Beyond

Two weapon systems training programs gained attention during the early l980s--the airborne warning and control system (employed aboard the E-3A Sentry aircraft) and the BGM-109 ground-launched cruise missile. Keesler's air traffic control program also garnered its share of publicity--especially after the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization walked off the job in August 1981. When President Ronald W. Reagan fired the strikers, it was Keesler-trained military air traffic controllers who stepped in to keep the nation's airways flowing smoothly.

Beginning in 1984, school officials worked with Air Force

Air Force air traffic controllers receive their initial training at Keesler.

Communications Command's 1872d School Squadron to develop prototype training programs using interactive videodisc (IVD) technology, which soon supported a variety of Keesler course offerings. Since then,

the use of IVD has become widespread elsewhere in government and throughout industry.

Significant as these changes were, however, they were dwarfed in importance by the political upheavals of the late 1980s and early 1990s, as the Soviet empire abruptly collapsed and its former member states began to fashion new destinies for themselves. The Cold War was over, and after more than four decades of being prepared to fight a global nuclear conflict, the Air Force suddenly found itself in a time of great uncertainty. Issues that had seemed well settled--from strategic doctrine to unit emblems and uniforms--were subjected to scrutiny and challenge, and for a time change seemed to be the only constant. Driven by deep defense budget cuts, the congressionally mandated base realignment and closure process culminated in a major downsizing effort, significantly impacting Keesler's training mission. With base closure forcing an end to technical training at Chanute AFB, Illinois, and Lowry AFB, Colorado, Keesler's growing importance as a technical university would become even more firmly fixed. The first additions arrived in 1990, as Keesler acquired Chanute's weather forecasting courses. Lowry's metrology and precision maintenance electronics laboratory training program followed in 1992-1993.

The Air Force's 1992 "Year of Training" initiatives--a top to bottom reevaluation of the process by which USAF technicians acquired and honed their skills--led to a host of organizational changes. One initiative proposed a drawdown of USAF field training detachments (FTD). These detachments were the mechanism by which USAF maintainers had traditionally gained their specialized knowledge of complex weapon systems, and the operating commands were understandably determined that this training should continue undisrupted. Still in the planning stages in 1995, the FTD drawdown initiative would divide weapon systems training among the major using commands and the technical training centers, and Keesler stood to inherit many new course responsibilities once the drawdown plan went into effect.

Another Year of Training initiative resulted in the return of flying training to Keesler for the first time since 1973. Tasked with providing operational airlift support training to pilots in C-12C/F Huron and C-21A Learjet aircraft, the 45th Airlift Squadron was assigned to the 81st Training Group. It began operations in July 1994.

Meanwhile, the massive restructuring of the Air Force in the early 1990s also meant several changes for Keesler’s tenant units. The first

occurred when the 53d Weather Reconnaissance Squadron (known throughout the Gulf region as the “Hurricane Hunters”) was inactivated on 30 June 1991. Its important storm-tracking mission transferred to a component of the 403d Airlift Wing, Keesler’s resident Air Force Reserve unit. Another base tenant change occurred when the 7th Airborne Command and Control Squadron and its EC-130 “flying command post” aircraft relocated to Davis-Monthan AFB, Arizona, in September 1994.

Those restructuring efforts similarly affected units assigned to Keesler Technical Training Center. In February 1992, Air Training Command redesignated the base’s host unit as the Keesler Training Center (KTC). The 3300th Technical Training Wing was downsized to become a group, and its component technical training groups became squadrons. The 3305th Student Group also inactivated along with its subordinate squadrons. In mid-September all of the 3380th numbered units assumed the 393d designation, as the base further realigned itself to conform with the Air Force's objective wing structure. In addition, the technical training group also assumed the 393d designation, and its nine technical training and training support squadrons were renumbered to better reflect the new, simplified organizational arrangement.

Yet another major change occurred on 1 July 1993, when Keesler Training Center inactivated, and its lineage and honors retired. On the same day, the 81st Tactical Fighter Wing, formerly located at RAF Bentwaters, United Kingdom, was redesignated the 81st Training Wing and concurrently activated to serve as Keesler’s host organization. At the same time, HQ USAF redesignated Air Training Command as Air Education and Training Command (AETC), and the command activated Second Air Force and stationed it at Keesler. Its mission was to oversee all technical training conducted within AETC.

Leading the way into the 21st Century

The end of the Cold War and the subsequent drawdown that followed, caused the Armed Services to refocus on a long dormant issue: namely Interservice Training Review Organization (ITRO) participation,

a review of military programs in order to eliminate training duplication and reduce training costs through consolidation. The first results of ITRO occurred at Keesler in 1995 when the ITRO Executive Board determined that all DoD Calibration training would be consolidated at Keesler. The first contingent of student arrived in 199 as the Navy closed down offices and moved equipment to Keesler from San Diego, California, and Norfolk, Virginia. The Marine Corps followed in 1997 as they transferred equipment and students to Keesler from Marine Corps Logistics Base (MCLB) Albany, Georgia. The courseload and population increase expected from the FTD drawdown dissipated in 1996 as USAF leaders determined that centralization of training under the FTD would be unrealistic.

The Year of Training initiatives begun in 1992 by then-USAF Chief of Staff General Merril A. McPeak continued to affect Keesler in the latter half of the 1990's. On 11 April 1994, Keesler opened the USAF's first two seven-level training courses-"Personnel Craftsman" and "Personnel Systems Management Craftsman". By the end of 1998, the 81st TRG conducted 24 seven-level courses that support 33 different career fields with an average daily student load of about 245.

On 4 October 1996, Keesler officially began "Triangle Vision", an ambitious five- year, $23 million building project designed to modernize the bases' 1950's era technical training dormitories and dining facilities. The first phase of this project called for the selective short-term repairs of existing facilities, including the renovation of restrooms, and the removal of hazardous material. The second phase replaces dormitories with 7 new facilities plus a new Training Support Squadron (currently at Garrard Hall) and the construction of an additional dining hall.

On 28 September 1998, Hurricane Georges slammed into the heart of the Mississippi Gulf Coast, causing over $3 billion worth of damage to Keesler and the surrounding counties. From its Caribbean origins in the Leeward Islands on 21 September, Georges killed nearly 400 people, with the majority of destruction in the Dominican Republic where at least 201 people died, 800 missing, and over 100,00 homeless.

In 1999, following Department of Defense guidelines, Keesler initiated a comprehensive A-76 study to determine whether commercial activities on-base could be done more economically and efficiently by either contract or in-house workforce. These A-76 studies fell into two categories—direct conversion, wherein an activity can be converted directly to contract, once cost effectiveness is proven (provided the

activity contains 10 or fewer civilians), and cost comparison, in which any function comprised of 10 or more civilians is compared with its government-operated counterpart. A tentative decision regarding this cost-saving process was forthcoming.

The great success of the gaming industry in South Mississippi encouraged rapid development of the commercial and housing projects in the proximity of Keesler, causing potential encroachment of the base's mission. At issue in the year 2000 was the impingement of accident potential zones at either end of Keesler's runway—both taller building heights and increased population density in these areas were factors that threatened the viability of Keesler flying mission, and the continued practicality of having an Air Force base in the midst of a municipality with no controls in place to limit the scope of its private sector development. Keesler and the City of Biloxi began discussions of how to both achieve the desired growth in the city's economy and preserve conditions for the Keesler's continued operations.

In the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on New York City and Washington, D.C., conditions on base reflected the heightened alert status enforced at government and military facilities all across the U.S. Keesler began the deployment of medical, technical, and security personnel to assist in Operation Enduring Freedom, the U.S.'s response to end the Taliban government in Afghanistan's support of Al-Qaeda terrorists.

2002 saw an increase in Keesler's student load, as the need for battle-ready technicians in the global war on terrorism became critical. Deployment of Keesler personnel to the Middle East and Southwest Asia continued as the U.S. government began pressuring Iraq to end their weapons of mass destruction program or face military action. New technology, in the form of the Schematic Power Browser, made teaching and learning more effective in Keesler's classrooms.

Operation Iraqi Freedom began in April of 2003, and the quick liberation of the Iraqi people from the terror of Saddam Hussein by U.S. forces was due in part to U.S. technological superiority, in which the U.S. Air Force and Keesler-trained personnel played a large role. A new C-130J Flight Simulator became operational in August; a $7 million dollar that offered pilots the ultimate in flight training.

In August of 2005 Hurricane Katrina hit the Mississippi Gulf Coast. As the worst natural disaster in our nation's history, Keesler Air Force

Base sustained major damage along with its Gulf Coast neighbors. An accelerated program of recovery and rebuilding began just days after the storm which will result in creating a new and improved version of Keesler Air Force Base, ready to meet the challenges presented in the 21st century.

In just over a half a century, Keesler has graduated almost two million students in numerous technical specialties, and it continues to be at the forefront of America's military training institutions. Through more than 50 years of constant change, Keesler's mission has remained essentially the same: to provide the very finest technical and specialized training to every student who passes through its gates.

Keesler today, the Air Force's premier electronics training center.

HISTORY

OF THE

81st TRAINING WING

Although not established until 1948, the 81st Tactical Fighter Wing's bestowed history goes back to World War II, when the 81st Pursuit Group (Interceptor) was activated in February 1942 at Morris Field, North Carolina. In May 1942, the unit was redesignated as the 81st Fighter Group and began training with P-39 Airacobra aircraft. Later that year, the group's ground echelon arrived in French Morocco with the force that invaded North Africa on 8 November 1942. Its air echelon, which had trained in England, arrived in North Africa in December 1942 and, under the Twelfth Air Force, supported Allied ground operations against the Axis forces in Tunisia. Afterward, the 81st patrolled the coast of Africa and protected Allied shipping in the Mediterranean Sea. The group also provided cover for ship convoys that landed troops on the islands of Pantelleria and Sicily and at Anzio, Italy.

The 81st Fighter Group flew P-51 Mustangs from Wheeler Field, Hawaii

In February 1944, the 81st transferred to India and began training with P-40 Warhawk and P-47 Thunderbolt aircraft. It moved to China in May and became part of the Fourteenth Air Force. The group continued training, but in January 1945, it returned to combat duty. There, the 81st attacked enemy airfields and installations and aided Chinese ground forces by attacking Japanese troop concentrations, ammunition dumps, communication lines, and other strategic targets. The group was inactivated in China on 27 December 1945.

The 81st Fighter Group was activated again on 15 October 1946 at Wheeler Field, Hawaii, and outfitted with P-51 Mustangs. On 1 May 1948, the 81st Fighter Wing was also activated at Wheeler Field, and the 81st Fighter Group became its primary operational component. (The group was inactivated in February 1955.) Although the wing's Mustang fighters were replaced with P-47N Thunderbolt aircraft, the wing continued to defend Hawaiian airspace until mid-1949. In June of that year, the 81st moved to Kirtland AFB at Albuquerque, New Mexico, where it began flying F-80C Shooting Star jet fighters. On 20 January 1950, the wing was redesignated the 81st Fighter-Intercepter Wing. Outfitted with the new F-86A Sabre fighter jet, it moved to Moses Lake (later Larson) AFB, Washington, a few months later. Upon arrival, the 81st was assigned to the Western Air Defense Force and given a new mission--air defense of the Pacific Northwest.

Just 14 months later, in August 1951, 81st personnel found themselves packing again--this time moving to RAF Bentwaters in England. As part of the Third Air Force, the 81st was the first F-86 Sabre unit to be based in Europe where it played a major role in the peacetime air defense of Great Britain. In 1954 the wing converted to the F-84F Thunderstreak, and on 1 April of that year, the unit was redesignated the 81st Fighter-Bomber Wing to reflect its nuclear strike capability. Thereafter, the 81st was charged with tactical operations for the United States Air Forces in Europe in support of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), with air defense as a secondary mission. The wing upgraded to the faster, longer-ranged F-101A Voodoo in early 1958.

In 1958 the F-101 Voodoo was the mainstay of the 81st Fighter-Bomber Wing in support of NATO.

On 8 July 1958, two significant events occurred. First, the wing was again redesignated, this time as the 81st Tactical Fighter Wing. Second, a nearby installation, RAF Woodbridge, was transferred to the 81st. Along with RAF Bentwaters, the two locations would be known as the wing's twin bases for the next 35 years.

Seventeenth Air Force became headquarters to the 81st in 1961, but in September 1963, the wing once again found itself under the command of Third Air Force. In 1965 the 81st converted to the F-4C Phantom II, and then in turn to the F-4D beginning in 1969. The 81st traded in its high-speed, high-altitude F-4s for the slow-flying A-10A Thunderbolt II ground attack aircraft in 1979, and for a time the wing was the Air Force’s largest operator of this nimble, tank-hunting aircraft, affectionally called the Wart Hog by its pilots and ground crews. In the late 1980s, the wing's 527th Aggressor Squadron flew the F-16 Fighting Falcon.

Throughout the 1980s, the 81st's mission was to provide close air support and battlefield interdiction in support of NATO ground forces. The wing also participated in rotational deployments to air bases in Germany, and it conducted joint training operations with U.S. and British ground forces. Following Operation Desert Storm, the 81st logged over

10,000 flying hours while patrolling "no-fly zones" over northern and southern Iraq to enforce UN sanctions against that outlaw nation.

The A-10 Thunderbolt, known affectionately as the “Warthog,” was used by the 81st Tactical Fighter Wing in Operation Desert Storm.

On 1 July 1993, the 81st Tactical Fighter Wing was inactivated at RAF Bentwaters. That same day, HQ USAF redesignated the wing as the 81st Training Wing, activated it at Keesler; and assigned it to the newly-active Second Air Force. Although its name and mission have changed, the wing’s illustrious history continues unbroken.

KEESLER COMMANDERS

Keesler Field:

Col Arthur W. Brock, Jr.	17 Jul 41
Col Robert E.M. Goolrick	15 Apr 42

3704th AAF Base Unit:

Col Robert E.M. Goolrick	1 May 44
Col Thomas S. Voss	1 May 45
Col John R. Morgan	6 Oct 45
Brig Gen Hugo P. Rush	8 Feb 46
Brig Gen Edward W. Anderson	15 Apr 47
Maj Gen Charles W. Lawrence	5 Apr 48

3380th Technical Training Wing:

Maj Gen Charles W. Lawrence	26 Aug 48
Maj Gen James F. Powell	18 May 49
Maj Gen Harlan C. Parks	20 Aug 53
Brig Gen James H. Davies	2 Apr 55
Maj Gen Fay R. Upthegrove	1 Sep 55
Maj Gen John R. Sutherland	3 Sep 57

Keesler Technical Training Center:

Maj Gen John R. Sutherland	1 Jan 59
Maj Gen John S. Hardy	12 Jul 60
Maj Gen Romulus W. Puryear	27 Jul 64
Maj Gen James C. McGehee	1 Aug 67
Maj Gen Thomas E. Moore	1 Aug 69
Maj Gen Frank M. Madsen, Jr.	29 Nov 69
Maj Gen Bryan M. Shotts	26 Feb 73
Maj Gen Winfield W. Scott, Jr.	1 Aug 75
Maj Gen John S. Pustay	29 Jul 77
Maj Gen Don H. Payne	24 May 79
Maj Gen Thomas C. Richards	8 May 82
Maj Gen Thomas J. Hickey	26 Sep 83
Maj Gen James G. Jones	18 Aug 86

Maj Gen Paul A. Harvey ..... 22 Jun 88
Brig Gen Paul E. Stein..... 30 Aug 91

Keesler Training Center:

Brig Gen Paul E. Stein..... 14 Feb 92
Maj Gen John C. Griffith..... 30 Apr 92

81st Training Wing:

Brig Gen Karen S. Rankin..... 1 Jul 93
Brig Gen Andrew J. Pelak, Jr. ..... 7 Nov 95
Brig Gen John M. Spiegel…….. 4 Aug 97

Appendix C

WING COMMANDERS

81st Fighter Wing:

Col Thomas W. Blackburn	1 May 48
Lt Col Francis R. Royal	21 May 49
Col Thomas W. Blackburn	28 Jun 49

81st Fighter-Interceptor Wing:

Col Thomas W. Blackburn	20 Jan 50
Col Gladwyn E. Pinkston	28 Apr 50

81st Fighter-Bomber Wing:

Col Gladwyn E. Pinkston	1 Apr 54
Col Harold N. Holt	2 Jun 54
Col Ivan W. McElroy	10 Jun 55
Col Lester L. Krause, Jr.	18 Jun 57
Col Henry L. Crouch, Jr.	8 Jul 57

81st Tactical Fighter Wing:

Col Henry L. Crouch, Jr.	8 Jul 58
Col James R. Dubose, Jr.	6 May 60
Col Eugene L. Strickland	9 Jul 60
Col William C. Clark	9 Jul 62
Col Robin Olds	9 Aug 63
Brig Gen Dewitt R. Searles	26 Jul 65
Col Ramon R. Melton	28 Jul 67
Col George S. Dorman	5 Jul 68
Col Devol Brett	25 Sep 68
Col David J. Schmerbeck	29 Aug 69
Col John C. Bartholf	6 Mar 70
Col James W. Enos	4 Sep 70
Col Dwaine L. Weatherwax	22 Jun 71
Brig Gen Charles E. Word	16 Aug 72
Col John R. Paulk	19 Apr 74
Brig Gen Clyde H. Garner	14 May 75

Col Gerald D. Larson..... 11 Feb 76
Col Rudolph F. Wacker..... 6 May 77
Col Gorden E. Williams ..... 7 Aug 79
Col Richard M. Pascoe ..... 24 Apr 81
Col Dale C. Tabor..... 20 Aug 82
Col Lester P. Brown, Jr. ..... 20 Mar 84
Col William A. Studer..... 26 Mar 86
Col Harold H. Rhoden..... 30 Jul 87
Col Tad J. Oelstrom..... 5 Aug 88
Col Roger R. Radcliff..... 12 Jul 91

81st Training Wing:

Brig Gen Karen S. Rankin..... 1 Jul 93
Brig Gen Andrew J. Pelak, Jr. ..... 7 Nov 95
Brig Gen John M. Speigel……. 4 Aug 97
Brig Gen Elizabeth A. Harrell……... 14 Jul 99
Brig Gen Roosevelt Mercer, Jr…….. 5 Sept 00
Brig Gen Michael W. Peterson……. 3 May 02
Brig Gen William T. Lord…….. 15 Apr 04
Brig Gen Paul F. Capasso…….. 19 Nov 05

AIRCRAFT ASSIGNED

Keesler AFB:*

B-24	1944-1945
B-32	1944-1945
OA-10	1944-1946
SB-17	1945-1946
B-25	1945-1950
AT-6	1945-1950
AT-7/C-45	1950-ca 1960
TC-54	1953-1954
C-47	ca 1950-1966
T-33	1957-1962
T-28	1969-1973
T-41	1969
C-130	1973-Present
RC-130	1973-1974
WC-130	1973-Present
EC-130	1975-1994
C-12	1994-1999
C-21	1994-Present
C-130J	1999-Present

81st Fighter Group:

P-39	1942-1944
P-38	1943
P-40	1944
P-47	1944-1945
P-51	1946-1948

*This list includes aircraft operated by tenant organizations, but it does not include aircraft used for ground-based technical training or administrative support.

81 stTraining Wing:*

F-47	1948-1949
F-80	1949
F-86	1949-1955
F-51	1951
F-84	1954-1959
F-101	1958-1966
F-4	1965-1979
A-10	1979-1993
F-16	1988-1990
C-12	1994-1999
C-21	1994-Present
C-130J	1999-Present

*Includes aircraft assigned to 81st Fighter Wing, 1948-1950; 81st Fighter-Interceptor Wing, 1950-1954; 81st Fighter-Bomber Wing, 1954-1958; 81st Tactical Fighter Wing, 1958-1993; and 81st Training Wing, 1993-Present. The 81st Fighter Group was a component of the wing from 1 May 1948 to 8 February 1955.

LINEAGE AND HONORS

Lineage:

15 Apr 48: Established as 81st Fighter Wing.

1 May 48: Activated.

20 Jan 50: Redesignated as 81st Fighter-Interceptor Wing.

1 Apr 54: Redesignated as 81st Fighter-Bomber Wing.

8 Jul 58: Redesignated as 81st Tactical Fighter Wing.

1 Jul 93: Inactivated.

1 Jul 93: Redesignated as 81st Training Wing and reactivated.

Honors:

Decorations--9 Air Force Outstanding Unit Awards:

(Awarded to the 81st Fighter Wing)

28 Mar 59 - 30 Jun 61
1 Jul 61 - 30 Jun 63
1 Jun 66 - 31 May 68
1 Jul 68 - 30 Jun 70
1 Jul 76 - 30 Jun 78
1 Jul 79 - 30 Jun 81
1 Jul 81 - 30 Jun 83
1 Jun 89 - 31 May 91
1 Jun 91 - 30 Jun 93

(Awarded to the 81st Training Wing)

1 Jul 99 -30 Jun 01
1 Jul 01 -30 Jun 02

Bestowed Honors

(Awarded to the 81st Fighter Group prior to 1 May 48.)

Campaign Streamers (World War II):

Air Combat, European-African-Middle Eastern Theater

Algeria-French Morocco	Tunisia
Naples-Foggia	Anzio
Rome-Arno	China Defensive
China Offensive	

CHRONOLOGY

1941

6 Mar	The War Department announced that the Army Air Corps would establish a technical school at Biloxi.
12 Jun	The War Department activated Army Air Corps Station No. 8, Aviation Mechanics School, Biloxi, Mississippi, and assigned it to Technical Training Command.
25 Jul	The base opened its first facility--a medical dispensary--in the Naval Reserve Park.
21 Aug	The first group of recruits arrived for basic training.
25 Aug	The War Department designated Army Air Corps Station No. 8 as Keesler Army Airfield.
8 Sep	The 310th Technical School Squadron, a basic training unit, was the first squadron to move from Tent City to the new barracks.
20 Sep	The Army Air Corps Replacement Training Center (Technician) was activated to train new recruits.
29 Sep	The Airplane and Engine Mechanics School began operation.
1 Dec	The post exchange opened its first full-service store on Keesler Field.

1942

27 Feb	The first airplane mechanics class graduated.
7 Mar	Keesler Field opened its first hospital, and the facility admitted 92 patients during its first day of operation.

1943

9 Mar	The 1002d Quartermaster Company, Keesler's first boat rescue unit, was activated and headquartered at the Biloxi Yacht Club.
10 May	The first women's unit, Detachment, Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC), activated. About two weeks later, the unit was redesignated as the 749th WAAC Post Headquarters Company.
1 Jun	Workers built a 10,000-seat outdoor theater adjacent to the Officers Club.
1 Jul	The War Department leased Horn Island for chemical warfare studies.
29 Nov	The Airplane and Engine Mechanics School received its first foreign students--13 Nationalist Chinese officers.
13 Dec	A Signal Corps Technical Training School opened. It was discontinued in February 1944.
27 Dec	The first bank, Keesler Field Bank, opened.

1944

1 May	The 3704th Army Air Forces Base Unit (Technical School and Basic Training Center) was activated as Keesler's host unit.
1 Jul	The B-24 Co-Pilot School opened. The school added B-32 co-pilot training in October, but it was discontinued in January 1945. The B-24 Co-Pilot School ceased operations in March 1945.
25 Jul	Keesler officials opened recreation facilities on Ship Island.

31 Jul	The War Department assigned its only emergency rescue school to Keesler. As a result, the 3704th Army Air Forces Base Unit (Technical School and Basic Training Center) was redesignated as the 3704th Army Air Forces Base Unit (Technical School, Basic Training Center, and Emergency Rescue School).

1945

1 Sep 45	Civil Service employees resumed five-day, 40-hour work weeks.

1946

Apr-Jun	The War Department inactivated all Army Air Forces airplane mechanics schools with the exception of Keesler.
23 Apr	Keesler disbanded its Emergency Rescue School and redesignated the 3704th Army Air Forces Base Unit (Technical School, Basic Training Center, and Emergency Rescue School) as the 3704th Army Air Forces Base Unit (Technical School and Basic Training Center).
30 Jun	Basic training ended at Keesler. As a result, the 3704th again changed its name, becoming the 3704th Army Air Forces Base Unit (Technical School).
1 Jul	The Air Chemical School opened
14 Dec	The Keesler Women's Army Corps detachment inactivated.

1947

1 May	Officials in Washington announced that the radar school at Boca Raton, Florida, would move to Keesler.

Jul-Sep	Keesler Federal Credit Union was chartered. The membership fee was 25 cents.
18 Sep	The worst hurricane to strike the Gulf Coast since 1915 made landfall south of New Orleans. (The practice of naming hurricanes did not begin until 1953.) The Biloxi area recorded winds in excess of 100 miles per hour and storm surges of 15 feet or more. Beach front buildings and seafood processing facilities sustained heavy damage. Keesler personnel conducted anti-looting patrols, rescued stranded storm victims, and made emergency repairs.
14 Nov	The Air Force officially transferred its Boca Raton radar school to Keesler; classes began in January 1948.

1948

13 Jan	Keesler Field became Keesler Air Force Base.
26 Aug	Keesler became an Air Training Command installation. Keesler replaced its base unit (3704th Air Force Base Unit)-type organization with a wing-base plan when Air Training Command designated and organized the 3380th Technical Training Wing. Also on this date, designated, organized, and assigned to the wing were the 3380th Medical Squadron (station hospital), the 3380th Air Base Group, the 3380th Technical Training Group, and the 3380th Maintenance and Supply Group.
28 Aug	Air Training Command discontinued the 3704th Air Force Base Unit (Technical School).
1 Nov	The 3380th Medical Squadron was redesignated as the 3380th Station Medical Squadron.

1949

Mar	The Air Force announced that the Airplane and Engine Mechanics Department at Keesler would transfer to Sheppard AFB, Texas, beginning in April.
Jun	The Radio Operations School moved from Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, to Keesler. The first course began on 15 June. Nine of the students were Air Force women. This was the first time Keesler had operated a coeducational technical course.
Summer	The Air Chemical School transferred to Lowry AFB, Colorado.
9 Nov	Airplane and engine mechanics training ended.

1950

27 Jun	The 3380th Station Medical Squadron was redesignated as the 3380th Medical Group.

1951

Jul-Sep	Keesler's hospital became the first in the Air Force to establish an appointment system for its outpatient clinics.

1953

Jan-Jun	Airmen began occupying the new dormitory-style barracks in the area nicknamed the Triangle.
16 Oct	The 3380th Medical Group was redesignated as the 3380th USAF Hospital.
1 Dec	Contractors began clearing the site for the new $5.5 million base hospital.

1957

8 Feb — Tactical Air Command's Air-Ground Operations School arrived from Southern Pines, North Carolina. Its T-33s were the first jets assigned at Keesler.

1958

1 Jul — Scott Air Force Base began transferring its control tower operator and radio operator general courses to Keesler; the process was completed by June 1959.

The 3380th USAF Hospital was redesignated as the USAF Hospital Keesler.

1959

1 Jan — Air Training Command redesignated the 3380th Technical Training Wing as the Keesler Technical Training Center, and the 3380th Technical Training Group became the 3380th Technical School, USAF. All student squadrons became school squadrons.

20 May — The SM-65 Atlas intercontinental ballistic missile ground training courses began.

1961

1 Dec — Keesler built a closed-circuit television studio to teach electronics principles. The studio was placed in Building 409, a former bowling alley.

1962

30 Jun — The base closed its recreational facilities on Ship Island.

1964

24 Mar — Officials dedicated a new NCO Club (Bldg 2221).

1965

9 Sep — Hurricane Betsy lashed the Gulf Coast with winds over 100 miles per hour and storm surges as high as 15 feet above normal. Downtown Biloxi suffered heavy flooding and wind damage. Keesler personnel assisted with rescue efforts, storm clean-up, and emergency repairs.

1966

1 Apr — The last C-47 left Keesler. These aircraft had been used for ground approach radar training, but the adoption of less expensive simulators made their use unnecessary.

1967

15 Jan — The command activated the 3389th Pilot Training Squadron at Keesler. This unit was to train foreign pilots under the Military Assistance Program (MAP) using the T-28 aircraft. Classes began on 23 January 1967.

1968

11 Jun — Keesler's technical school graduated its one-millionth student.

1 Jul — With Amarillo AFB, Texas, closing, Air Training Command moved its personnel and administration courses to Keesler. The transfer increased Keesler's student load by 20 percent.

1969

1 Jul — Keesler's student load peaked at 14,000 during the Vietnam War.

1 Jul — Air Training Command redesignated the USAF Hospital, Keesler as the USAF Medical Center, Keesler. At the same time, the facility became one of six regional medical centers in the Air Force hospital system.

18 Aug — Hurricane Camille made landfall at Waveland, Mississippi, clocking gusts of over 200 miles per hour and pushing water surges as high as 35 feet above normal. More than 260 people were killed, and communities in five states were devastated. Keesler officials estimated on-base damage at $3.5 million. During a subsequent inspection visit, President Richard Nixon praised the base's heroic rescue and community assistance efforts.

1970

15 May — Ground-breaking ceremonies were held for the new base exchange shopping center.

1971

4 Jan — Keesler reorganized under the multi-deputy system, and the air base group commander became the base commander.

1 Mar — Air Training Command activated the 3380th Student Group and assigned 18 student squadrons to it.

1 Jul — Kitchen Patrol, or KP, ended at the base when civilian contractors assumed responsibility for food preparation.

6 Oct — Base officials held a ground-breaking ceremony for the new commissary.

1972

1 Aug — Air Training Command inactivated the 3380th Technical School at Keesler and, on the same date, activated the USAF School of Applied Aerospace Sciences, Keesler and assigned it to the Keesler Technical Training Center.

1973

25 Apr — The Air Force Reserve activated the 920th Tactical Airlift Group at Keesler and equipped it with C-130s.

4 May — The T-28 pilot training program ended after graduating 908 foreign students--the majority from South Vietnam.

18 Jun — The 53d Weather Reconnaissance Squadron, a Military Airlift Command (MAC) unit, moved from Ramey AFB, Puerto Rico, to Keesler.

21 Dec — Keesler became the prime technical training center for the airborne warning and control system (AWACS).

1974

10 Jun — Blake Gym opened.

1975

18 Aug — The first of seven EC-130 aircraft belonging to the 7th Airborne Command and Control Squadron (Tactical Air Command) arrived at Keesler.

1976

Jan — A $31.6 million Composite Medical Facility was built to give the medical center a separate clinical research laboratory.

Biloxi city officials obtained government approval for an access bridge which would connect Keesler with Interstate 110.

Workers began constructing a $3.6 million facility to house a reception center, as well as personnel, finance, and traffic management offices. In 1978 the building was renamed as the Sablich Center.

Summer 76 — The City of Biloxi began acquiring right-of-way acquisition along Pass Christian Road between the

base and Debuys Road so that it could be widened to four lanes. The Department of Defense would pay for 90 percent of the $3 million project.

30 Dec — Student load fell below 5,000.

1977

1 Apr — HQ ATC inactivated the USAF School of Applied Aerospace Sciences, Keesler and activated the 3300th Technical Training Wing and assigned it to the Keesler Technical Training Center.

1 Apr — Air Training Command established the USAF Technical Training School, Keesler and assigned it to the 3300th Technical Training Wing.

1978

1 Jan — The USAF Technical Training School, Keesler transferred from the 3300th Technical Training Wing to Keesler Technical Training Center.

Air Training Command inactivated the 3300th Technical Training Wing.

1979

Jan — Construction began on a new logistics/materiel complex, which would later be dedicated as the Taylor Logistics Center.

13 Sep — Hurricane Frederick struck, causing about $11 million in property damage on the base. In addition to base clean-up, many Air Force personnel assisted with recovery efforts in several communities along the Gulf Coast.

1 Nov — Air Training Command designated and activated the 3300th Technical Training Wing. Air Training Command reassigned the USAF Technical Training School, Keesler, from Keesler Technical Training Center to the 3300th Technical Training Wing.

1980

4 Apr — Base officials dedicated the new control tower. It replaced a tower that had been in use since 1941.

31 Dec — Student load climbed to 6,891.

1981

13 Mar — Base officials dedicated the new child care and dependent care centers.

27 Apr — The USAF Medical Center opened its new $45.3 million clinic addition.

1 Aug — As a result of the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization strike, the 3300th Technical Training Wing had to increase its production of air traffic controllers.

1982

24 Apr — Keesler Air Force Base hosted its first Special Olympics for the mentally retarded. The event drew 350 participants.

4 May — The new Medical Food Inspection Facility, which also housed the base's new veterinary clinic, began operation.

1 Jun — Keesler lost its postal training courses when the Department of Defense decided to consolidate all such training at Fort Benjamin Harrison, Indiana.

1983

1 Jan — Surgeons at the medical center began performing cardiovascular (open heart) surgery.

1 Nov — Keesler's Air Force Reserve unit, the 920th Tactical Airlift Group, was inactivated. Its personnel and

equipment were absorbed by the reserve's newly-activated 403d Rescue and Reconnaissance Wing.

1984

10 Aug — The base dedicated its new $4.7 million civil engineering complex.

1985

2 Sep — Hurricane Elena struck the coast, causing $5 million damage at Keesler.

1986

1 Oct — Morse code systems radio operator training moved to Fort Devens, Massachusetts. This training had been at Keesler since 1949 when the general radio operator course moved from Scott.

1987

15 Mar — Volunteers completed two super playgrounds on the base using the previous year's energy savings plus money donated by on and off base personnel.

2 Jun — The new $7 million computer training facility opened.

1988

1 Mar — The Family Support Center was established and located in the Sablich Center.

30 Sep — Average daily student load was 3,026--the lowest in the history of the technical school.

4 Oct — Through the efforts of the John C. Stennis Chapter of the Air Force Association, a Boulevard of Flags was established on Larcher Boulevard.

1989

1 Feb — Builders began working on a new operations facility for the 3380th Security Police Squadron. It would replace the converted World War II barracks which the squadron used as a headquarters.

Contractors began building a new squadron operations center that would also house three tenant organizations: the 7th Airborne Command and Control Squadron, the 53d Weather Reconnaissance Squadron, and the 24th Weather Squadron.

1990

28 Aug — Members of the 7th Airborne Command and Control Squadron deployed to Southwest Asia in support of Operation Desert Shield.

1991

22 Jan — Over 260 Keesler medical personnel deployed to various locations in support of Operation Desert Storm.

30 Jun — Military Airlift Command inactivated the 53d Weather Reconnaissance Squadron. The 53d's hurricane hunter mission transferred to the 403d Airlift Wing, Keesler's Air Force Reserve unit.

12 Jul — Keesler AFB celebrated its 50th anniversary.

1992

14 Feb — To organize Keesler as an objective center, Air Training Command redesignated the technical training center as Keesler Training Center, the 3300th Technical Training Wing became a group, and all technical training groups became squadrons. At the same time, Air Training Command inactivated the 3305th Student Group and its subordinate units. Also in line with this reorganization, the command

redesignated the Keesler Technical Training Center Medical Center as the Keesler Medical Center.

6 Apr — The Department of the Navy assumed control of the base printing plant.

15 Sep — All 3380th-designated units were redesignated as 393d units.

1 Dec — All Air Force weather courses transferred from Chanute AFB, Illinois, to Keesler. Classes were temporarily held in Allee and Wolfe Halls while new facilities were under construction.

1993

16 Feb — Fisher House was dedicated. It provided temporary quarters for the families of seriously ill patients at the Keesler hospital.

29 Apr — A new two-story 87,000-square foot weather training complex was officially dedicated.

1 Jul — HQ USAF redesignated Air Training Command, headquartered at Randolph AFB, Texas, as Air Education and Training Command (AETC).

HQ AETC activated Second Air Force at Keesler and made the numbered air force responsible for all technical training in the command.

The command inactivated Keesler Training Center and all of its subordinate organizations, with the exception of the 393d Technical Training Group, which was redesignated as the 81st Technical Training Group.

HQ AETC activated the 81st Training Wing and assigned it to Second Air Force. The wing assumed the old center mission. Major components of the wing included the 81st Technical Training, 81st Support, 81st Logistics, and 81st Medical Groups.

HQ Keesler Medical Center inactivated, and HQ AETC activated the 81st Medical Group to operate the base hospital, which was still known as the Keesler Medical Center.

1 Jul — The First Sergeants Academy moved to Maxwell AFB, Alabama. At the same time, HQ AETC reassigned the academy to Air University.

The paralegal service specialist and chapel management courses moved to Maxwell, falling under the purview of Air University.

1994

15 Apr — Keesler's new Officer's Club was dedicated. The old club, which had been one of two original buildings on the Keesler property, was closed.

1 Jul — The 45th Airlift Squadron was activated and assigned to the 81st Training Group. Equipped with C-12C/F Huron and C-21A Learjet aircraft, it brought flying training back to Keesler for the first time since 1973.

10 Jul — Members of the 81st Security Police Squadron went to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, in support of Operation Sea Signal, the resettlement of Haitian refugees.

25 Aug — The 81st Medical Group's functions were divided among four newly-activated units: the 81st Medical Operations, 81st Aerospace Medicine, 81st Dental, and 81st Medical Support Squadrons.

24 Sep — Crotwell Theater closed its movie-showing function. However, movies would still continue to be shown at Welch Theater in the Triangle area.

30 Sep — The 7th Airborne Command and Control Squadron, a base tenant reporting to Air Combat Command, was reassigned to Davis-Monthan AFB, Arizona.

1995

31 Jan — Keesler's Aero Club closed its doors after more than 40 years of operation. The Aero Club was established in November 1954.

1996

25 Jun — Terrorists detonated a massive car bomb near the Khobar towers in Dharan, Saudi Arabia. Eleven Keesler personnel were deployed to the Air Base, including Staff Sergeant Rondal Burns of the 333d TRS who was seriously injured and subsequently awarded the Purple Heart, and SrA Martie Capoeman of the Wing's Public Affairs Office who received an AF Achievement Medal with 'V' (for valor) device for her performance in providing emergency medical care.

4 Oct — The demolition of Cole Manor (Bldg. 7401) signals the beginning of Triangle Vision, a $123 million project to replace the ten early 1950's era dormitories by the year 2002.

1997

19 Feb — In a ceremony attended by hundreds, Keesler officials raised the USAF 50th Anniversary Flag on the base flagpole adjacent to the Wing Headquarters building. The ceremony marked the fist in a yearlong series of events intended to recognize the Air Force's founding on 18 Sep 47.

24 Feb — Lieutenant General John C. Griffith, AETC Vice Commander, led an official party in breaking ground for the first construction phase of Triangle Vision.

1 Jul — Mirroring an Air Force-wide change, the 81st Security Police Squadron was redesignated as the 81st Security Forces Squadron.

18 Sep — Keesler capped off the year's 50th Air Force Birthday celebration by burying a time capsule at the

foot of the base flag pole and a parade on Governors' Field.

16 Oct — The 338th TRS graduated the last class of students to attend the Satellite and Wideband Communications Course at Keesler. Thereafter, the U.S. Army Signal Center at Fort Gordon, Georgia would be responsible for conducting all DoD 'Satwide' training under a consolidation ordered in 1994 by the Interservice Training Review Organization (ITRO).

1998

9 Mar — Keesler's newest facility, the 6,000 square foot Marina Recreation Center (Bldg. 6726), was opened. The $1 million Center will host fishing, boating, and sailing activities, as well as other outdoor programs.

26-28 Sep — Hurricane Georges, one of the most destructive storms in history, slammed into the Mississippi Gulf Coast, causing major damage to Keesler and the surrounding community. The Category IV hurricane swept into Keesler with sustained winds of 142 miles per hour and gusts to 179 miles per hour, flooding over 100 family houses, downing hundreds of trees and power lines, and the loss of power to major pockets of the base. While Keesler suffered no fatalities during the storm, elsewhere over 400 people were killed, including 201 people in the Dominican Republic.

1999

17-18 Feb — The 403d Wing, Keesler's Reserve tenant unit, received the first of the new C-130 J trainer aircraft. The J model aircraft replaces the 1960's era aircraft, lowering operating costs and enhancing performance and capabilities of the unit's weather reconnaissance mission.

2002

15 Jan

The 403d Wing swapped out their older WC-130H aircraft for the newer C-130J models. Lockheed-Martin previously maintained a stock of spares and supplied these parts for the C-130Js; now they function as an Air Force depot and supply only C-130J peculiar spares. There were countless common parts between C-130 models. The 81st Supply Squadron assumed support responsibility for the C-130js and common parts were now supported through the SBSS by appropriate Air Force/DLA depots.

10 Oct

The environmental restoration at Landfill #3, per EPA guidelines, was completed near the south entrance of marina park. The capping of the 12-acre project site, an active landfill from 1950-1974, included a geosynthetic clay layer with 1 ½ feet of soil and topsoil. The completion of this $3.7 million project expanded Bay Breeze Golf Course's 13th and 14th holes (originally Par 4 holes) into two Par 5 holes.